

Faith and Inspiration

String of Generosity

During this holiday season, one cannot help but observe an emphasis on giving.

Integrated into many of the cultural observances that occur at this time of year is the practice of bestowing gifts of varying nature and significance upon those around us.

One might ordinarily assume that this would be a good and admirable thing, to encourage a spirit of generosity amongst the members of humanity. Many would postulate that in Christian tradition, the exchange of presents as part of the Christmas commemoration is intended to reflect God's generosity manifested towards us.

God's provision of salvation is the ultimate gift in the form of Jesus's sacrifice — not only the giving of his life by crucifixion, but the very Incarnation itself. God becoming a man in order to endure the human experience and participate in our existence, with all of its challenges and burdens, from birth until death, was unequivocally the most selfless venture ever undertaken by any being at any time.

However, many of us find that we are not always entirely receptive to demonstrations of generosity directed towards ourselves. There is a certain aspect of human nature that prefers to emphasize self-reliance rather than dependency. Whether it may be perceived as weakness, negligence, or any other form of character defect, it is not unusual for a person to balk at the thought of such inferred vulnerability.

Although self-sufficiency and self-determination might be considered laudable qualities in various contexts, it can also be true that an indication of personal growth is an ability to accept — or even seek — offers of assistance, exhibiting self-awareness of one's own limitations or shortcomings.

In an episode of the "Star Trek: Enterprise" television series, prequel to the original "Star Trek," Captain Jonathan Archer makes the executive decision to solicit support in the depths of deep space following an incident that results in the Starship Enterprise NX-01 incurring significant damage. Archer announces to the crew: "We've answered enough calls for help over the past year. It's time someone returned the favour."

On a mundane or material level, many people are averse to admitting they may not be able to do everything for themselves; likewise, spiritually, there are certainly those who remain insistent that their souls have no need or use for salvation from any source beyond their own ability or capacity.

The reality is that we are all in desperate need of redemption, and there is nothing we could ever do ourselves to restore the shattered relationship with God.

The Bible clearly describes the redemptive work of Jesus and its appropriation of restoration and liberation as a gift from God, offered by his own will and goodness, not correlated with or contingent upon any entitlement on our part (John 4:10, Romans 5:15, Romans 6:23, 2 Corinthians 9:15, Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5).



Vincent V. Marshburn
Homestead Mennonite Church



It is not something we deserve or have earned; salvation has been delivered as a matter of God's compassion and lavished as evidence of his love.

Another aspect of our reluctance or refusal to accommodate true generosity derives from a sense of skepticism or suspicion towards others.

For various reasons, we may sometimes find ourselves doubting the sincerity of others or questioning their intentions. In typical human fashion, our response to generosity is often less than admirable, many times manifesting as either envy or mistrust.

In many scenarios, the notion of giving is perceived as a matter of rivalry. The impulse becomes one of asserting dominance in an effort to demonstrate superiority — the desire to flaunt or to outshine someone else. At times, an apparent act of ostensible altruism may turn out to be in reality a symptom of egotism or guilt, neither of which are particularly appealing or impressive to the recipients — or to God for that matter.

Alternatively, we may simply question the motives or effects of an act of generosity, assuming there must be some kind of caveat or catch. People often find it difficult to comprehend the concept of "no strings attached." Ultimately, it may be summarized as an issue of trust.

In the aforementioned episode of "Star Trek: Enterprise," Captain Archer and the crew are directed to a mysterious, isolated, and automated space station where they are able to make arrangements for repairs to the ship in exchange for seemingly minimal resources. Archer expresses to his first officer

T'Pol his misgivings about the repair station's supposed benevolence.

T'POL: You seemed troubled. ARCHER: Guess I need to do a better job at repressing my emotions. These repairs are one hell of a bargain at only two hundred litres of warp plasma, don't you think?

T'POL: Not every culture is based on the acquisition of wealth. The station's builders could simply have been interested in helping others.

ARCHER: What happened to them? They could have at least left a message. "Thanks for stopping by."

T'POL: Perhaps they prefer anonymity.

ARCHER: Don't you find that a little suspicious? I know you don't put a lot of faith in your feelings, but I've learned to trust mine. Something doesn't smell right.

It turns out that Archer's apprehension is in fact justified when they discover the "hidden cost" of accepting the space station's services: the forced integration of a crew member's cerebral functions into the station's computer core. Understandably, the crew members do everything they can to extricate themselves from the sinister situation.

It is probably not difficult to understand some of the cynicism that develops surrounding superficial exhibitions of generosity. For instance, many are critical of the motives of the retail industry in promoting — often to an excessive degree — the purchasing of gifts during the holiday season. Some perceive the frequent and immense pressures exerted by tremendous merchandising efforts as a kind of commercialization of seasonal celebrations that otherwise exhibit selfless and charitable intentions.

Certainly, the giving of gifts in itself should not be construed in any malicious manner. But when the emphasis becomes the comparison of quantity or quality, especially when perceived as reflecting the status or prestige of the giver, then the essence of generosity becomes rather diluted.

One recalls Jesus's parable of a widow's seemingly paltry offering to God, which he described as "more than all others" in value due to her authentic spirit.

The value of God's gift to us is literally immeasurable. Redemption through Jesus requires only acceptance on our part. The price was paid by Jesus himself; it is a perfect gift in the truest sense, with no provisional clauses or caveats.

We need not debase or demean our own worth, and we need not suspect or dispute God's motive. The only string attached is the one which we would be compelled to cast ourselves as we, in gratitude, secure ourselves to the hope and magnitude of his grace.

Ideally, God's generosity towards us inspires our own generosity towards others during any season.

OBITUARY

Carletta S. Marcus

On November 15, 2022, Carletta S. Marcus passed away peacefully after a brief illness. She was 95 years old.

Carletta was born in Findlay, Ohio on March 5th, 1927. Carla, as she was known, had a loving childhood, spending her early life tapdancing and playing saxophone in the marching band. Carla married the love of her life Joseph S. Marcus in 1949. Carla and Joseph traveled the world together. Temporarily living in Japan and eventually settling in South Florida. Together they had a son, Michael J. Marcus, which Carla described as her "lifetime biggest achievement".

Carla was a charitable individual and a leader in her community. She donated her time to Homestead Hospital and the Sacred Heart Women's Club. A lifetime devout Catholic, Carla could often be found at church or volunteering her time at the church gift shop. She enjoyed playing cards with her friends. But, most of all, her passion in life was her family.

Carla was preceded in death by her husband, Joseph. She is survived by her son, Michael J. Marcus and his wife Robin Rena Marcus and their two sons, Joseph Michael Marcus and John Michael Marcus. In addition, Carla is survived by her beloved niece, Carletta Jane Lineberger, her husband Richard W. Lineberger and their children.

She was a tremendous mother, grandmother, aunt, and friend. She was adored by all and is truly missed.

PARKS from 2B

Alaska has been revealed as the least popular, with only 7,362 visitors in 2021.

 Joshua Tree in California has been named the best-located national park, only 0.2 miles from the nearest city.

 Zion in Utah has been revealed as the most beautiful national park in the US, being awarded an overall beauty score of 7.87.

Activity	National Park
Hiking	Yosemite National Park
Fishing	New River Gorge
Camping	Olympic National Park
Rafting	Grand Canyon National Park
Climbing	Joshua Tree National Park
Biking	Acadia National Park
Skiing and Snowshoeing	Grand Teton National Park
Canoeing and Kayaking	Glacier National Park
Birdwatching	Everglades National Park
Wildlife Viewing	Yellowstone National Park

To submit an obituary or death notice, email wording and jpg photo to info@newsleadermail.com, 305-245-2311
Print deadline is Wednesday at noon.

Temple Hatikvah

Homestead Jewish Center

A Reform Congregation

183 NE 8th St., Homestead

For information please call

305-454-4944

or visit www.thhjc.org

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Question:

What should I do if I think someone is using my Social Security number?

B. Murray, Coral Gables

Answer:

If you think someone is using your number, there are several actions you can take. Note that we can only resolve Social Security number reporting problems on our own records.

Review the earnings posted to your record on your Social Security Statement. To get your online Statement, log into your personal my Social Security account and check your account. If you see any

inconsistencies, contact the Social Security Administration. We consider identity theft one of our major challenges so we have joined in government-wide efforts to prevent Social Security number misuse.

If you want to report identity theft, visit the Federal Trade Commission's Identity Theft page. This guides you through each step of the recovery process. It's a one-stop resource managed by the Federal Trade Commission, the nation's consumer protection

agency. If you believe someone is using your Social Security number to work, get your tax refund, or other abuses involving taxes, contact the IRS online or call 1-800-908-4490. You can order free credit reports annually from the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian and TransUnion). Make a single request for all three credit bureau reports:

- Go online and fill out the Annual Credit Report Request Form, (Disclaimer), or
- Call 1-877-322-8228
- File a police report

File a report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place.

Question:

Does Social Security send emails to the public?

M. De La Rua, Pinecrest

Answer:

Yes, we may send you an email after a discussion with you that was either in person or over the phone, or, after completion of an online action. We also send informational emails about our online services. Also, if you have a my Social Security account, we send an email once a year, approximately three months before your birthday, to remind you to review your Social Security Statement online. Additionally, if within my Social Security you elected to receive Courtesy notifications by email, we will send you

emails when we deliver new messages or notices to your my Social Security Message Center.

Question:

Can noncitizens living in the United States receive Social Security benefits?

S. Perone, Weston, Florida

Answer:

Yes, if they are lawfully in the United States and meet all eligibility requirements. Lawfully present noncitizens include, but are not limited to:

- Noncitizens lawfully admitted for permanent residence under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA);
- Certain noncitizens admitted under other INA classifications that allow them to live and work in the United States;
- Noncitizens admitted under Family Unity or Immediate Relative provisions; and

See SSI 6B

LESLI BURKHEAD
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